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Flood, and Leak, at the Pentagon

The reason for the recent lie-detector tizzy at the Pentagon was that someone dared to whisper the true cost of the Administration's indiscriminating military strategy: not the staggering \$1.5 trillion already budgeted for the next five years, but perhaps \$2.2 trillion. Defense Secretary Weinberger scoffed at the leaked "wish list" of his generals and admirals. To the Joint Chiefs, however, the arms and forces they seek are "requirements" if the President will not redefine their military mission.

The embarrassing leak did not compromise national security. It only exposed the real dimensions of Mr. Reagan's vague program to "rearm America," now strongly reaffirmed in his State of the Union address.

If there is to be any rational limit to the buildup, the armed forces need more realistic assignments — or more time. The alarming budget figure their requirements produced made it clear that even Mr. Reagan's huge increases will not in five years prepare, as he asks, for "prolonged conventional wars simultaneously in several parts of the globe."

Even before the Chiefs raised the ante, Congress was properly skeptical that the Reagan budgets could buy all the forces and weapons on which Mr. Weinberger had begun to make down payments. There are further doubts that the projected buildup is really the best way to meet the Soviet challenge.

The Pentagon's request for \$214 billion for 1982 slid through Congress last year with little debate and little change. But things will be different in this difficult economic year, despite the consensus for greater military strength.

Mr. Reagan is expected to seek about \$250 billion for 1983. With inflation factored out, that is a dramatic 36 percent above the pre-Reagan appropriations for 1980 but only half the increase in annual ap-

propriations that Mr. Reagan wants to achieve by 1986. Given the Federal deficit, Congress simply has to demand a better rationale for these investments.

So far, the Administration's strategy seems to amount to little more than buying more of everything. Mr. Weinberger wants to order two more \$3 billion nuclear supercarriers to add to the one Congress imposed on President Carter. But when planes, escort vessels and maintenance are included, the jump to a 15-carrier Navy will cost a staggering \$17 billion per carrier.

The Navy as a whole is to be expanded from 450 to 600 warships, at a vast cost, yet to be calculated. The Army expects to get two more divisions and 7,000 M-1 tanks. The Air Force is down for five more tactical air wings. Yet a third or more of each of these services is not ready to fight and is unlikely to be ready soon if the buildup delays needed supplies, repairs, training and transport.

The failure to make critical choices also haunts the Administration's new \$180 billion strategic arms buildup. It is far from clear that the country needs two new intercontinental missiles, two new long-range bombers (at up to \$400 million each), sea- as well as air- and ground-launched cruise missiles, new research in ballistic missile defense and a costly revival of antiaircraft and civil defense.

Yet none of this will answer the most important strategic problem: the potential vulnerability of existing silo-based long-range missiles. The Administration is buying big new MX missiles before it knows whether they can be safely based and will put them "temporarily" in the same vulnerable holes. As Senator Glenn has urged, MX should be postponed until its value is clear.

Incoherent plans are bound to shatter the consensus for a military buildup. Mr. Weinberger ought to pin a medal on the loose-talking leaker. He raised the right questions, at just the right time.